

# **Marketing Edamame Soybeans in Kentucky**

**Location of Project:** Owensboro, Kentucky (Southern Region)

**Purpose:** Farmers in the South are challenged by the uncertainty of tobacco quotas and markets as well the continuing low prices for bulk commodities such as corn, soybeans, and wheat. Many Southern states, for example, North Carolina and Kentucky, are exploring marketing concepts such as vegetable cooperatives and farmers markets to increase their cash sales of crops. In this project, several producers decided to grow edamame soybeans and test market their product in farmers markets in Owensboro, KY and Evansville, IN. They developed educational programs about edamame, which they offered at farmers markets, schools, food service associations, and even a local radio talk show.

**Accomplishments:** The producers were involved with growing edamame soybeans, a variety that can be eaten fresh, to be promoted in farmers markets in Owensboro, KY and Evansville, IN. As part of this promotional effort, brochures and banners were designed to feature Kentucky-grown labels. Easy-to-prepare recipes, as well as the most current

health claims and sources regarding soy foods research, were offered to those who expressed interest.

A workshop was conducted to coincide with the annual meeting of the Kentucky School Food Association in Owensboro, KY, which featured presentations on edamame soybeans. Approximately 195 participants attended the event from across the State. Participants were able to receive information regarding the history, the nutritional value, and the health benefits of edamame soybeans, as well as observe demonstrations by local chefs, who prepared various dishes featuring edamame in recipes listed in the promotional brochure.

The ways in which edamame soybean products were sold varied depending on the specific market outlet. At farmers markets, the producers sold one pound bundles of beans, equivalent to around 15-18 stalks, on the stalk, for \$2.00. At other types of produce stands, beans were typically sold off the stalk, in the pod, also for \$2.00 per pound.

One of the producers served as a guest on a WVJS radio talk show in Owensboro every Monday morning to provide food safety, cooking, and recipe tips for local listeners. The radio audience for

the segment reached about 9,000 people across Daviess County. During the segment, she discussed the nutritional components and recipes for edamame, and told listeners to expect these beans at the Owensboro Farmers Market. At the market, samples from various recipes were made available for tasting and samples were also given away so that consumers could experiment with recipes.

This same producer also published a monthly county consumer newsletter in Daviess County that reached nearly 500 families. In July 2001, she wrote an article for the newsletter that featured edamame as a vegetable with new crop possibilities, and discussed the health benefits of edamame soybeans and offered several recipes.

Another producer partnered with staff members of the University of Kentucky to create a website to promote edamame soybeans. The website can be found at [www.uky.edu/ag/hortbiz](http://www.uky.edu/ag/hortbiz) under the “edamame soybean project link.”

**Lessons Learned:** While producers had some modest success selling edamame, they encountered resistance from many customers who knew nothing about this new product.

**Conclusion:**

Because customer awareness of edamame was so limited, farmers must discover ways to promote this product in order to be successful. Farmers markets provide an excellent atmosphere for such promotional activities. These may include easy-to-use recipes and tips in preparing and storing the beans. Media coverage – newspaper food sections, radio talk shows, and television cooking shows – have the potential to greatly enhance consumer awareness of not only edamame but other soy foods as well.